

Coal Fly Ash Release

Frequently Asked Questions



- **How has the state responded to the coal fly ash release?**

A number of agencies from the state of Tennessee responded immediately to the coal ash spill Dec. 22 and will continue to be engaged over the long term. **The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC)** is overseeing the cleanup.

Governor Phil Bredesen announced an enforcement order on Tuesday, Jan. 13 that formalizes the state's ongoing oversight of cleanup activities at the Kingston site, requires information related to the cause of the release and addresses the stability of other TVA sites in Tennessee. The order requires TVA's cooperation with the state in supporting independent assessments and inspections at Kingston and other TVA coal-waste sites around the state as well as the development of a corrective action plan detailing the steps TVA will take to clean up the Kingston site and ensure safe operations in the future. The order also requires TVA to reimburse Environment and Conservation for response and oversight activities.

TDEC continues independent sampling activities of air, drinking and river water, private wells and soil and ash and is coordinating closely with the **Tennessee Department of Health (TDH)**, which analyzes the samples TDEC collects at the state laboratory in Nashville. TDH also provides risk assessors to determine whether adverse health effects are likely based on the data. The Department of Health has also gone door-to-door to conduct a health survey and share information with area residents.

The **Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency** is conducting a fish tissue survey, and will share those results with TDEC to determine whether any additional fish consumption advisories are warranted. Currently, people are advised to avoid fishing in the immediate area of the spill, and to follow all existing advisories, which were put in place prior to the spill due to historic contamination in the Watts Bar Reservoir.

- **How can I see the state's sampling plans?**

The Department of Environment and Conservation is regularly conducting independent sampling and has developed sampling plans to guide these ongoing efforts. Sampling plans are available on the department's Web site at www.tn.gov/environment - click on the link to the Kingston ash release.

- **Is my drinking water safe?**

Ensuring a safe drinking water supply has been a priority of the state from the beginning. The Department of Environment and Conservation collects samples from the Kingston and Rockwood drinking water plants daily and sends them to the state laboratory in Nashville for analysis. This sampling is ongoing to ensure people continue to get quality drinking water. To date, all sample results indicate the municipal drinking water is safe.

- **Is my well water safe?**

The Department of Environment and Conservation is sampling private wells within a four mile radius of the spill site for metals at no charge. As of Jan. 15, 65 wells have been sampled and results are shared directly with the property owner when they are received from the lab. Results to date have not indicated exceedances of the primary drinking water standards for metals. This sampling does not include sampling for bacteria or other constituents that would not be attributed to the fly ash release. If you live within four miles of the site and would like your well sampled, you may call Environment and Conservation's Knoxville Field Office at 865-594-6035 or 888-891-8332.

- **What is being done to ensure the air is safe to breathe?**

TVA is keeping the ash moist to prevent it from becoming airborne and is seeding and mulching it, and applying an encrusting agent for dust suppression.

Extensive air monitoring to date has not indicated an air quality problem and monitoring will continue. Environment and Conservation will review and approve all TVA air monitoring efforts and split air samples with TVA for quality assurance. The department will also do independent air monitoring to serve as a reference for air data and TDEC will continue operation of its existing air monitor in Harriman.

- **What is being done to clean up the river?**

The enforcement order requires TVA to submit a plan for cleaning up the river and the department will review that plan to ensure it is adequate.

The department authorized the construction of a weir in the Emory River to stop the downstream flow of the fly ash. TVA will submit a plan to the department outlining dredging activities to remove the fly ash from the river channel. The ash sinks, but an element of the ash called cenospheres float and move with the wind and currents on the surface of the water. In addition to having to remove the ash from the river bottom, TVA is collecting the cenospheres from the surface.

Environment and Conservation is collecting river water samples above and below the impact site twice per week or more often as conditions warrant. TVA is also collecting samples.

- **What about the future?**

The state is committed to overseeing cleanup of the coal ash release to ensure it is done with the health of the public and the environment as the key priorities. TDEC is setting up a local office at the Roane County Health Department facility for community contacts.

- **What is in the ash?**

The ash largely consists of different oxides of metals produced during the combustion process such as Silica Dioxide, Aluminum Oxide, Iron Oxide, Calcium Oxide and Magnesium Oxide. These compounds do not dissolve in water and do not present a risk to public health or the environment. However, coal ash also contains small amounts of heavy metals that could be harmful to human health under certain conditions – primarily through ingestion or inhalation.

The department has collected soil and ash samples from the ash pile on the TVA site and from nearby yards to have them tested for metals and to see how likely metals are to leach from the material. The soil and ash samples will also be analyzed for radioactivity and polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons. We expect to receive sample results for all parameters beginning Thursday, Jan. 15, 2009.

- **What is being done with the ash?**

The enforcement order issued against TVA requires a corrective action plan to be submitted to TDEC within 45 days from the day the Order was received by TVA. The order requires that plan to include information on how TVA intends to safely manage the ash in both the short and long term. The plan must be approved by the department.

If you have questions, contact:

**Tennessee Department of
Environment and Conservation
888-891-TDEC (8332)**

**Updates, including sample results,
monitoring plans, and the enforce-
ment order are available on the
Internet at:
www.tn.gov/environment**



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